# Castlemaine Naturalist

*February 2003*

*Vol. 26.1 #296*

**Dawn Breakfast, 6am, 11/1/03**

This year the sky was clear, and the morning was cool and still for the dawn breakfast which has almost become an annual event in January. This year Margaret Badminton took us to her property behind the Castlemaine Golf Links, and though the Owlet Nightjar didn't choose to honor us with its presence, we had a very satisfying list from Margaret's property and the golf course.

We decided to have breakfast first as the sun wasn't really up, and most birds could only be identified at that stage as LBJs (Little Brown Jobs, in case you didn't know). We'd brought our own breakfast, except for Debbie, who lives nearby, and had hers first, and Hans and grandson Jackson, who also ate at home and walked in to meet us, but Margaret delighted us all with drop scones and blueberry jam all round. Yum. Thanks Margaret.

As we breakfasted we were entertained by an Olive-backed Oriole. Fuscous Honeyeaters and Magpies were among the first on the list, but Debbie soon added Crested Shrike-tits and Black-chinned Honeyeaters. Not long after we set off towards the Links someone spotted Diamond Firetails, and soon after we added a breeding pair of Willie Wagtails which kept scolding us and feeding at least two nestlings. The White-browed Babblers were very obliging, foraging for their breakfast with Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Blue Wrens. White-browed and Dusky Woodswallows, Welcome Swallows, Tree Martins and Fairy Martins, a lone Hardhead and a Little Grebe were seen around the dams.

Altogether we recorded 41 species.

Don't you wish you got up at 5am and joined us, too? It really was a glorious morning.

Rita Mills

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Somewhere in Mount Alexander Shire..... circa January 23, 2003 already.

Very many thanks for the enormous support in varieties of forms from the Castlemaine Field Naturalists membership. To know there was concern out there intangibly helped enormously to challenge the impression that the world (my sector) had become a very dark and dangerous place to be. Courage to return to a rearranged reality has been slow and difficult and I thank people for their patience. Different spokes for different folks. Five days in hospital is a clue to the impact.

An attempt to return to work, to salvage a job opportunity in Melbourne proved beyond overly optimistic. In fact the distraction of trying to take on a new position in vulnerable condition turned out to be a very poor decision and set back recovery a great deal. I NOW recall Erikson having a theory of progression and order which is proof of my experience. Recovery from shock is to be completed before grieving can commence and that, before refreshment of spirit is possible for a clean slate of sorts from which to then move forward. So, begin again. RECOVERY 1.

The emotional pain has had very physical repercussions through the healing process, like rewiring a completely blown fuse box and getting fresh stimulus through collapsed communication lines - somewhere beyond enervating!

I had left the property wearing 'rubbish clothes' due to the day's activities - quite unfit for the *being hit by a bus* scenario. Your generous financial contributions enabled immediate replacement of basic personal effects (toiletries and a set of clothes), a pair of work boots necessary for walking safely around the paddock and fire site, also doubling as chef boots, a basic uniform replacement and one small knife, and provided for immediate living expenses generated by crisis accommodation. Donation of other goods have helped reinstate a sense of physical domain and autonomy - like Linus and his rug. Active support in the present - accommodation, cleaning up, documentation and emotional sustenance have made a new future look possible. The future is still an unknown form, a way off yet, but the present is becoming a more livable reality as a result of the community strength of this Group. I am truly overwhelmed.

ZOe Thomas

## "Not to be Missed"

If you like landscapes, trees, patterns in nature, magnificent photography, make sure you don't miss David Tatnall's exhibition, *Seeing The Forest and The Trees*, at the Castlemaine Art Gallery. It's current until the 9th of March.

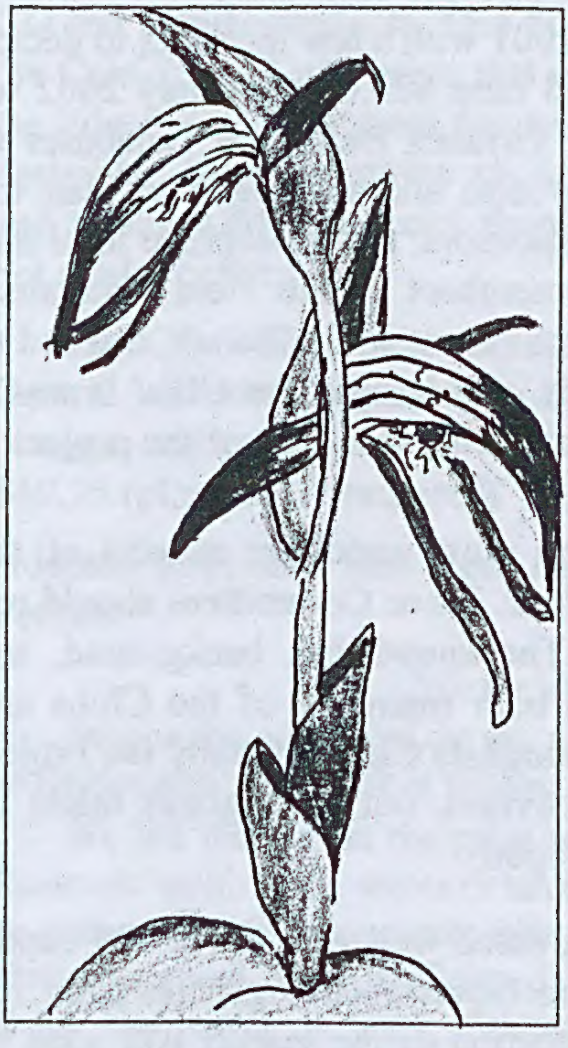
PLANTS OF THE MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

## Looking Back

Redbeak Orchid, *Lyperanthaus nigricans*

A few months ago someone gave me a photocopy of an article from the Wirrakee which was published at least 25 years ago. The information came from the late Fred Taylor, and the accompanying illustration was taken by Reg Smart, who was 90 last birthday, and still going strong.

It reads -



"..... Mr. Fred Taylor of Harcourt informed me that the Red-beak Orchid, *Lyperanthus nigricans* had been found in flower it Castlemaine. It had been located by Mrs. Satori of Castlemaine at the Mt. Alexander Golf Course.

"To our knowledge this would be the closest to Bendigo that this orchid has been found. ....

"Lyperanthus is from the Greek - *lyperos*, mournful, and *anthos* a flower, and refers to the fact that the flowers turn black after they have finished blooming.

"*Nigricans* also means 'turning black'.

"The plant is usually about 9 inches high with an average of 6 flowers. The flowers are quite large and are light coloured with reddish purple stripes.

"The leaf is usually flat on the ground, roughly heart shaped and is thick and fleshy, up to two inches wide.

"The orchids flower only occasionally in September to October after a bush fire and are said to flower very prolifically.

"Editor"

I don't know the date of the newsletter or who the Editor was at the time, but it must have been sometime in the 1970s. I wonder if this orchid is still in existence in the area, though I hope we don't have to experience a bush fire to find out.

Rita Mills

## The Plants and Animals of the Box Ironbark Area of Central Victoria - the CD ROM.

The launch of the CD at the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens on 6 December, 2002 marked the end of the first part of a major co-operative project between the Castlemaine, Bendigo and Maryborough Field Naturalists Clubs. . The clubs organised donations from local and state government agencies so that we could contract Viridans Biological Databases to produce a CD-ROM to our specifications.

The Project started in August 2001 with a few meetings to decide what we wanted and how we could raise $20,000. By July 2002 we were able to give instructions to Viridans Biological Databases to begin the final preparation of the disc and we began to plan the launch. Representatives of the 10 sponsors, the appropriate local and state government officials, and members of the Field Naturalists Clubs were invited. About 80 persons came to the launch, listened to the speeches, enjoyed morning tea, and bought the CD's. It was a successful launch of a successful project. Phase One of the project is now completed.

We must now begin with the most important aspects of the project: Phases Two, Three, and Four. Three Committees should run these three activities in parallel. The knowledge, background, and type of involvement will involve both members of the Clubs and groups and persons outside the Naturalists Clubs. Initially the Project has about $2,000 to fund these activities, but more grants might be available when programs are developed.

**Phase Two: Sales**. This has progressed well with about 120 copies sold. Most sales have been direct to Government Agencies and Club members but we expect that this portion of the market will soon be saturated. The next market groups will be the secondary and high schools, and LandCare-type groups. The Sales Committee will organise the packaging and mailing the CD's, ordering additional stock, maintaining records, and distributing CD's to retailers, etc. The

Committee members will not need to meet very often or know the technical details of computers or plants and animals, but they will need to have good administrative skills.

**Phase Three: Collection of data.** The Naturalists Committee will manage the acquisition and correction of data that should be on the next revision of the CD. The Club has received plant record forms from the Flora section of DS&E at Heidelberg. Land Care members could assist with data collection. This phase will be on going with no end-point. Hopefully many Naturalists will use the CD and excursions to develop their competence and thus become "experts".

**Phase Four: Education.** The Education Committee will also be on going. It may be desirable to have two committees: one for public education and one for school education. We need to get the Education Department to develop a Curriculum Unit for using our CD and similar products. This does not mean that we should develop the Curriculum Unit, rather that we should be a lobby group to show the Education Department that a Curriculum Unit (at several levels) is desirable. Demonstrations to schoolteachers, conservation groups, and public workshops, etc. should be seen as part of education and not a sales activity.

The CD-ROM Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria is available to Club members at $45.00 (plus $5.00 postage and packaging for each order). The price to the public is $49.95 (plus p&p if required).

Adapted from an e-mail from Bill Holsworth of the BFNC, by Ern Perkins.

## McKay Reservoir

Despite the warmth of the day a good number turned out for the outing to Castlemaine's reservoir at the foot of Tunnel Hill.

We left the cars at the gates and walked in through the trees to the Reservoir itself, which seems to have been extended since I last was there - or perhaps it's the new water filtration system that makes the difference. There were well over 100 Coots on the water, with a Musk Duck, a Little Black Cormorant, a Great Crested Grebe and couple of Little Pied Cormorants.

There were quite a number of Choughs around, but the only rosellas seen were juvenile Crimson Rosellas. Orioles were heard calling on the far

side, but I don't think anyone spotted any when we walked across the dam wall, but the ravens were in good voice, as were the Rufous Whistlers.

Everything was very dry but there were a few things in flower, mostly Late Black Wattle *A. mearnsii*, Tall Bluebells *Wahlenbergia stricta*, and Golden Everlastings *Bracteantha viscosa*. A number of Eucalypts in flower, and the Box Mistletoe, provided food for the very vocal Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. We noted down 29 bird species.

After the outing we sat down near the dry watercourse not far where we had parked the cars and enjoyed our picnic tea - no lawns or picnic tables but plenty of atmosphere and good company to make up for that!

Rita Mills

## Observations

• A Bee-eater was seen on the Maldon Road on 13/12 by Enid Chapman.

• Stephen and Tom Garnett recorded White-browed and Masked Woodswallows, 4 Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck, Great Crested Grebes, a Wedgetailed Eagle and Rufous Songlark at Tullaroop in December, and at Glenluce on Hopkins Road they found a Sacred Kingfisher, Diamond Firetails and 3 Woodswallows.

• Hans and Ann van Gemert have White-browed Woodswallows nesting on their property at Muckleford - and lots of Fuscous Honeyeaters.

• Eucalypts noted to be in flower in December, many out of their usual flowering season, were Red Gum, Yellow Gum, Ironbarks, Yellow Box, and Grey Box.

• Margaret Badminton rang on 28/12 to report a Banded Lapwing with two chicks on a dam on the Muckleford Yapeen Road, not far from the area where the Spiny Riceflower grows. On 1/1/03 Maureen and Ken Dredge and Rita and Doug Mills counted a number of Banded Lapwings, including 3 juveniles, on the rise to the west of the same dam. There were more appearing amongst the rocks and from over the top of the hill, but we gave up counting at 15 seen at the one time.

• Seen early morning at Barkers Creek 14/1/03 - about 12 White-browed Woodswallows feeding, apparently on nectar, in the blossoms of a Yellow Box. Rita Mills

• Barbara Maund, who lives in Kennedy Street, has had some surprising visitors - a Kangaroo in her back yard on the Sunday before Christmas, and an Echidna at 5.15pm on 13/1.

• There were four Boobook Owls in the Botanical Gardens on New Year's Day. Lake Joanna seems to have a Bluegreen Algae problem. George Broadway.

• Richard Piesse reported that they have had a Brown Falcon hunting rabbits on their property south of Vaughan every day for the last 2 weeks of January.

• Both Richard and Margaret reported birds sheltering under their verandahs against the wall on very hot days. Margaret's were Magpies, and Richard's were small birds.

## Omnivorous Possums?

Except for the time that I saw the possum we had raised reach out and take a spider from its web and eat it, I always though possums were vegetarian, or mainly so. However during the last few months I've suspected them of polishing off meat left over by the cat - its what I call Cat Stew, and has some vegetables in it, and rice, pasta or rolled oats, but its mainly pet mince. Now I am quite sure they are omnivorous - at the moment anyway - as the carefully picked bones of the chicken wing my cat turned his nose up at was dropped though the wire on the top of his cage - so either a fox has climbed on top of his cage (I doubt it!) or a stray cat has eaten it on the top of his cage (and I doubt that one, too) or the possums around our place are turning carnivorous - perhaps, like our magpies, they are becoming junk food addicts!

Have I just been unobservant, or is this just because they are so hungry because of the drought conditions? Has anyone else noticed?

Rita Mills

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 30/1/01

There are several sets of **Seed-collection Workshop notes** available for sale for $5 per set.

The **"Is it a Native" CD** is nearly ready for distribution. The means, costs, etc. are still being discussed

The next **Roadside Cleanup** will be in April.

The Committee has recommended that the **Subscriptions** remain the same as 2002. It was also decided to delete the category of "Supporting Member" as it was felt that this category is no longer relevant.

**Roadside Conservation** is seen as a project or the coming year. Mount Alexander Shire was once a leader in Roadside Conservation and we would like to see it gain that status again.

**Richard Piesse** has recommended a touring map of the Wombat Forest which is available from the Department of Environment and Sustainability, and some Melbourne map shops. It includes roads, tracks and walking tracks.

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**Disclaimer** - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

**Reminder** - Articles, reports and observations for the CN can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barker St. if that is more convenient for you.

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, February 2003 Programme

**General meetings** are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

**Excursions** leave promptly at the times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are **NO excursions on total fire ban days.**

**Business meetings** are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are welcome at club meetings and excursions.

**Fri. Feb. 14.** ***Annual Meeting.*** *The New National Parks.* Speaker is Ann Casey, Ranger in Chief, Northern Goldfields area. 8pm UCA hall.

**Sat Feb. 15**. *Lake Wendouree Wetlands*, a look at the birdlife. Take lunch, etc. Leader E. Perkins. Leave **the Octopus**, opposite the Motel in Duke Street, at **10 am** sharp.

Thur **Feb. 20**. *Business Meeting*, 27 Doveton St. at 7.30. **Note change of date.**

**Fri. Mar 14**. *Flora of Tasmania.* Speaker is Phil Collier. 8pm, UCA hall.

**Sat. Mar 15**. *Coliban Channel, Taradale.* Leader, Margaret Willis. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp. You will be able to walk just a short distance, or walk the full 13 km if you prefer. Take drinks, afternoon tea. Wear suitable footwear, and carry a backpack if you intend walking the full distance. There will be a car shuffle if anyone wants to do the full walk.

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**2002 Committee** - E Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C Morris (VP and Grievance Officer), G Broadway (Secretary) ph 5472 2513, H van Gemert (Treasurer), R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), M Badminton, G Harris, B Maund, M Oliver and R Piesse. 5472 1082

**Recommended Subscriptions for 2003 -**

Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24.

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*

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***Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club,***
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***Incorporation #A0003010B***

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